

Extra Bodies

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The Use of the ‹Other Body› in Contemporary Art

November 18, 2017–February 04, 2018
Opening: Friday, November 17, 2018

Ai Weiwei, Vanessa Beecroft, Guy Ben-Ner, Oscar Bony, Christoph Büchel, Clegg & Guttman, Gino de Dominicis, Maria Eichhorn, Jens Haaning, Yves Klein, Yoshua Okón, Yuri Pattison, L.A. Raeven, Edwin Sánchez, Christoph Schlingensiefel, Santiago Sierra, Jonas Staal, Teresa Margolles, Stephen Willats, Carey Young, Artur Żmijewski

The exhibition sheds light on a phenomenon in art that first rises to prominence in the 1990s and then explodes in the early years of the new millennium: the artistic practice of resorting to and deploying ‘extra bodies.’ Artists select these ‘other bodies’ because of their specific social or biosocial role—which is why they may also be characterized as extras. All works on view share a basic ‘performative’ or ‘theatrical’ quality. Strikingly, the viewer is neither drawn into the action nor invited to participate. Unlike many artistic productions discussed under the rubric of relational aesthetics, these pieces do not demand his active engagement. Taking up both exhibition floors at the museum, the extensive group exhibition featuring numerous works from the collection scrutinizes the various modes in which extras with their social and biosocial roles are presented, and function, in art.

The show assembles major positions making use of ‘other bodies’, though it does not aspire to draw up a comprehensive canon of this thematic field. It eschews the real presence of the ‘other body’ in the gallery, although such presence is a constitutive element in the genesis of the kind of work it examines, instead focusing on the different modes of presentation that allow for a discussion of the phenomenon of the ‘other body’ in contemporary art from a variety of angles. In most of the works, the human being takes the stage not as an individual but as part of a group or formation, a ‘collective body’. Conspicuously, the growing visibility of the ‘extra body’ in art coincides with the deregulation of markets in the early 1990s. The defining feature of this development is that human labor, thanks to a global expansion, becomes ever more inexpensive — a phenomenon Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have portrayed as the “New Spirit of Capitalism”. Maurizio Lazzarato has trenchantly pinpointed their basic hypothesis, noting that life, in today’s economy, has become a currency.

The extensive group exhibition is on view of both gallery floors at the museum and includes several pieces from the collection. The majority of the works on the ground floor were created in the first decade of the twenty-first century; this section is rounded out by selected examples of historic art. The upstairs gallery is reserved for three artistic positions (Jonas Staal, Guy Ben-Ner, and Artur Żmijewski) that reflect on the theme of the ‘other body’ in light of the contemporary situation. Created over the course of the past year, these works address the migrant body, which, as Mark Terkessidis has argued, may be regarded as “Westerners’ unloved ‘shadow ego’: globally oriented, mobile, flexible, willing to make sacrifices.” No other ‘extra body’ has figured more prominently in the social and political debates of the past few years. The role it plays can be read in the mirror of socioeconomic changes and is integral to the discursive field around biopolitics, globalization, and neoliberalism.

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Media:
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The companion book *Extra Bodies — Über den Einsatz des ‘anderen Körpers’ in der zeitgenössischen Kunst* (in German) will be published by JRP|Ringier in January 2018.

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